

1. Jesus Made the Persecutor into the Preacher
 - a. Saul immediately was proclaiming the gospel
 - i. "immediately"
 1. Luke is particular here – Saul was not trained up by the church in Damascus, he immediately began to preach about Jesus in a demonstrable way
 2. How was he able to preach so soon after his conversion with clarity and conviction?
 - a. The Spirit of the Lord Jesus had chosen him to be such
 - i. The vision to Ananias stated that Saul was Jesus’ “chosen vessel of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles, and the kings and children of Israel”(v15)
 - b. It is also likely that he had studied “the Way” and their claims about Jesus, heard sermons like Stephen’s, but had rejected it because of the resurrection
 - i. Now he knew that Jesus was resurrected, and it meant that all those proofs were true
 - ii. Thus, it was not a mystical revelation of knowledge, like the gnostic view of truth (for Paul condemned such ‘taking stands on visions’, cf. Col. 2:18)
 - c. Rather, it was theological reflection on the Scriptures and the new revelation to him that Jesus was, indeed, alive and raised from the dead – it changed everything!
 - ii. That "this one is the son of God"
 1. The content of his proclamation was that Jesus is the son of God
 - a. This is the only time this phrase is used in Acts!
 - b. It shows us something particularly Pauline in his proclamation of the gospel
 2. What does this description mean?
 - a. Deity?
 - i. Paul uses this term to show that the resurrected Jesus is particularly unique in His relationship to God and particularly intimate with Him as well
 - ii. However, the pre-existence of the Son of God, as eternally co-existent with the Father is not found in the book of Acts
 1. It is, though, a major element in Paul’s letters.
 - b. Authority?
 - i. Paul parallels this description with “the Christ”
 - ii. Thus, the resurrected Jesus is the Christ (or Messiah), which is the Son of God
 - iii. This emphasizes the rule of God as King and judge and Savior
 1. Thus, to “call upon the name of the LORD” from Joel 2:32 is applied to Jesus, the Son of God, the Christ
 - c. Messiah?
 - i. It is Jesus who will finally restore all things as the Son of God sent from God (3:19-21)
 - iii. “in the synagogues”
 1. Saul went to the place where the history of God’s revelation was already taken as true
 - a. In the synagogue there is a shared history and common worldview
 - b. Creation, Fall, Judgment, Redemption, Restoration, are all themes which are rooted in the Jewish Scriptures, the OT
 2. Plural – Saul was going to multiple synagogues, showing a pattern of ministry to reach the Jewish people first

- a. Evangelism uses touchstones of shared truth and reinterprets them through the gospel of Jesus Christ
 - b. Human dignity = image of God – climax is the Cross of Christ
- b. All those who heard were amazed
 - i. same word used of Simon the magician's effect on people
 - ii. The fact that this respected Pharisee had begun to proclaim that “this one”, i.e. “this Jesus of Nazareth” was the Son of God was absolutely confusing
 - 1. Two questions which explain their amazement:
 - a. Is not this the one devastating those who call upon that name in Jerusalem?
 - b. Has he not come here for this purpose: to lead them up to the high priest having bound them?
 - 2. It was the sudden change from the notorious persecutor to a man contrary to that reputation, now arguing publicly for the veracity of the claims to which he was so adamantly opposed
 - iii. It was the sovereign grace of God transforming a man which gave them great wonder!
- c. While the people were confused, Saul was being “empowered”
 - i. “Rather” implies a distinct comparison to the amazed people
 - ii. The word “empowered” (*ενεδυναμουτο*) indicates a strengthening *by the Spirit of God*, for it is passive
 - iii. This empowerment was that his teaching was well-founded and well-reasoned
 - 1. and was baffling the Jews living in Damascus
 - 2. “showing how it all fits together” – “together + to cause to stand” (*συνυβιβάζω*)
 - a. that “this one is the Christ”
 - i. note the parallelism b/w 'son of God' and 'Christ'
 - b. In the synagogues, approved by the Jewish authorities, he began to proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God
 - i. He is the Christ, the expected one
 - ii. He is Eve’s promised Seed – the Curse-breaker
 - iii. He is the mediator between God and Man, the Federal Head (second, and true, Adam) in whom is found true Life
 - iv. He is the true and greater Moses
 - v. He is the true and greater David, etc.
 - iv. The Spirit of God was making the gospel so clear, Saul was “proving” that the Old Testament showed that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Son of God, the Christ
 - 1. His hearers could not accept this, nor could they refute it, hence they were at a loss
 - 2. Because they could do neither, and Saul was continuing to proclaim powerfully and fearlessly in their synagogues, they responded with violence

2. The Preacher Becomes the Persecuted

- a. A significant time passed
 - i. “as sufficient days were being fulfilled”
 - ii. This is an impressive, but vague, way of saying “a long and ample time had passed”
 - 1. This is consistent with the time in Arabia, return to Damascus, and then three years later went to Jerusalem, which Paul mentions in Galatians 1:17-18
- b. The Jews plotted together to kill him
 - i. “The Jews” is not a racial term, but a religious one, indicating those who rejected Jesus
 - 1. There were clearly racial Jews who did not reject Jesus, but who entrusted themselves to Him, but they are not referred to by Luke as “the Jews”
 - ii. They were even watching the gates by day, and even night, to kill him
 - 1. The repetition of “to kill him” and the summary of their focus in watching the gates of the city show the intensity of their hatred towards Saul and the intention to kill him
 - iii. Saul was now one of the people to whom Jesus had so united Himself that He had told him in that vision, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.”

1. This persecution is an evidence of union with Jesus, for the desire to kill him was rooted in the hatred of the Christ, not because Saul was a jerk
 2. They hated Jesus and His gospel, not merely his messenger – BUT JESUS SEES THEM AS ALL ONE
 - a. To persecute His Church is to persecute Christ
 - b. There is something to be said here about this particular union as well:
 - i. To ignore the church is to ignore the Christ, for they are united
 - ii. “If you love me, you will love my Bride”
 - c. But their plot was made known to Saul:
 - i. And his disciples (?) took him at night
 1. Over the years Saul had, by the power of the Spirit, gained followers, presumably from the Jews, in Damascus
 2. These are called “his followers”, i.e. they followed him out of the influence of “the Jews”
 - ii. lowered him through the wall
 1. “let him down”
 - a. Luke uses two words for “let down” which are a division of a compound word used in Joshua’s conquest of Canaan and the LORD delivering the Promised Land to the Israelites
 - b. When Rahab lowered the Israelite spies down through “a window in the wall” (Joshua 2:15) the compound word is the same as the two words used by Luke
 2. So what?
 - a. Luke is making an allusion between the people of the LORD (Saul, his followers) being pursued and ultimately coming to victory by faith in the LORD, just like Rahab, an unexpected inclusion
 - b. In other words, the gospel is triumphing through persecution, and the kingdom of God’s promise is growing through the proclamation of the Son of God
 - c. It is an interesting note that Saul was a Benjamite, and this tribe took pride in the fact that their patriarch was the only one born in the Promised Land (Gen 35), on the way to Bethlehem
 3. In fact, his tribal ancestry which had been his glory before his conversion, would have exalted fighting, not running
 - a. Benjamites were warriors – even taught to fight left-handed to give them an edge in battle (1 Chr. 12:2)
 - b. When King Saul was killed, his son Ish-bosheth ruled over all the tribes except one: Judah
 - iii. Humility is the Floor of Great Ministry
 1. So, for Saul, the Benjamite, to proclaim the glory of the Lion of the tribe of Judah, be threatened and then run away, it took a humility that had not existed before
 2. In fact, the name which he chooses to be called for the rest of his life is the name Paul – which means “small”, “small Paul”
 - a. 2 Cor 11:30-33 he uses this very example as evidence of weakness
 3. This humility is necessary, the sufferings of Christ, to keep us from trusting in ourselves
3. The Humbled Preacher Tries to Join the Church
 - a. Those filled with the Spirit desire to be united to the community of believers
 - i. He was attempting to unite (*κολληομαι*) to the disciples having arrived in Jerusalem
 1. This is the same word used in 5:13 of those who “did not dare to join them” in the aftermath of Ananias and Sapphira’s judgment
 2. Will be used twice more in Acts to show Gentiles being united to the Jewish believers in Jesus through Peter’s vision and proclamation (10:28) and of the various Gentiles who believed the gospel in Athens (17:34)

- ii. Luke is very careful to textually communicate that “having arrived in Jerusalem he was attempting to unite”
 - 1. The emphasis is on the eagerness of Saul
 - a. Quickness to join them as soon as he arrived
 - b. Perseverance to join them
 - i. “was attempting” shows a continual attempt
 - ii. This wasn’t a one-time shot at ‘joining the church’
 - 1. He was unsatisfied until he did and he wouldn’t take no for an answer
 - 2. In fact, it appears that he had to implore Barnabas to speak to them for him
 - iii. It is normal for those persecuted for the name of Christ Jesus to try and unite with others who also proclaim Christ
 - 1. He is not only looking for ministry, but for fellowship, as a runner from danger seeks refuge with friends
- b. all feared him
 - i. Christians are not to be naïve
 - 1. This was, most likely, three years after Saul’s conversion!
 - 2. Yet, the Church still remembered Saul’s name, intention, and what he had done to Stephen and others.
 - a. Three years, in a world without instant communication and personal contact, is a brief enough time-frame to make this understandable
 - b. The Church is not condemned for this tentative spirit, but the *claim* of Saul’s conversion is corrected by the *evidence* of his conversion
 - ii. not believing that he is a disciple
 - 1. Anyone can *say* that they believe and submit to Jesus as Savior and Lord
 - a. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 5 Paul notes that the Church is not associate with any “so-called brother” who continues to pursue sin boldly
 - i. “one who names himself brother” would be a literal translation
 - b. This concept of “so-called” is always a derogatory term of pretense – that which is calling itself something is, in fact, not truly that thing
 - i. The other times that it is used is usually referring to idols as “so-called gods”(1 Cor 8:5; 2 Thess 2:4)
 - 1. That is, they name themselves that, and claim the nature of such, but they are not, nor are they even capable of being such
 - 2. There is propriety in expecting fruit of this before uniting to someone when their motives are to be suspected!
 - a. They did not want to “lay hands too quickly” (1 Tim 5:22) – that is, to identify as one with him before they were sure that his conversion was not a ploy to gain their confidence
 - b. Saul never seems to hold this tentative acceptance against the Jerusalem Church
 - i. He was truly humbled and reasonable of their concerns – so he did not demand that they take his word
 - ii. Yet, there was a word to be given
- c. This about his humiliation grew because of this!
 - i. The “front office” rejected him!

4. An Encourager Vouches for the Genuineness of His Faith

- a. Barnabas led him to the apostles
 - i. having taken hold of him
 - 1. Barny seems to literally grab Saul and walk him in to the apostles himself
 - a. You almost get a feel for the one nicknamed Barnabas, the “Son of Encouragement” whose birth name is Joseph, being so frustrated with

2. We also immediately see the promise of the Lord's selection of Saul, whom He said He "would show Him how much He must suffer for my name"
 - c. The brothers recognized this
 - i. they brought him to Caesarea
 1. "they brought him"
 2. Look at the unity now! They belong to one another and take upon themselves the burden of Saul's danger.
 - ii. and they dispatched him to Tarsus
 1. His hometown, on the southern coast of what is now Turkey
 2. Tarsus was originally a Hittite city, and a metropolis with various trade routes connecting it, making Saul very well-trained to ministering across cultures
 - a. In the Roman period it secured the patronage of Emperor Augustus because his childhood tutor was a native of Tarsus
6. Jesus, the Lord, is Keeping His Promise to Build His Church
 - a. The church grew throughout the entire region
 - i. Judea, Galilee, and Samaria
 - ii. This is a collective description of ancient Israel, the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
 1. Again, the connection to Joshua's receiving of the land, Rahab's connection to lowering down the men through the window in the wall, etc. is clearly indicated
 2. The Church, united to Christ Jesus, the true Abraham, the true Joshua, the true David, etc. is the true people of God who receive all the covenantal promises through Him
 - a. 2 Corinthians 1:20
 - b. Luke is giving a strong indication that Jesus is Abraham's offspring who receives the entire inheritance
 - i. The "land", therefore, is not the physical dirt of ancient Palestine, but the people who belong to Him
 - ii. This is further alluded to in the words "was being multiplied", for it is the same word used in the promise to each of the patriarchs (Abe, Isaac, and Jacob)
 - iii. "was being multiplied"
 1. Abraham – Genesis 17
 2. Isaac – Genesis 26
 3. Jacob – Genesis 28 and 48
 - c. It was having peace
 - i. being built up
 - ii. and going
 1. in the fear of the Lord
 2. in the encouragement (*παρακαλεω*) of the Holy Spirit

When the Lord moved to make Saul His chosen instrument, He transformed the hardened heart of Pharaoh into the soft heart of Moses. It is the majestic authority of the Christ who builds His Church and turns an enemy into a brother to lead the people of God together into the Promised Land of redemption and freedom and joy in union with Jesus Christ. And how does He take His redeemed people into the Promised Land? He takes them there by blazing a path through the waters of death at the expense of His own life. Jesus will get His people into the Promised Land because He is true and better Moses who grants triumph through His sovereign grace transforming hardened hearts into humble hearts, having rescued His people, carrying us through certain death by the watery gash plunged into his own heart upon the cross. He is faithful. He is good. He is trustworthy.

So, take the risk to proclaim Him. Take the risk to include those former enemies. Rest in His sovereign promise that He is building His Church and the gates of Hades will never overcome it. Have no fear, dear friends, in the presence of great evil in the world. Christ Jesus has authority over all things and He is moving in power to build for Himself a people zealous for goodness and fit for eternity.